5. Embodied encounters with the ancestors

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Introduction

In 2006 a Late Bronze Age tomb was excavated at Arediou, Cyprus. It had been used over several generations between the 16th and 14th centuries BCE, during which time the burials were repeatedly disturbed and the post-cranial bones of the deceased had been mixed together with the grave goods and pushed up against the north-eastern wall of the tomb (Steel and Thomas 2008, 241–3). Intriguingly, despite the evidence for these multiple burials, not a single skull was recovered from the tomb. This unusual patterning of the physical remains of the deceased suggests post-mortem interactions at least once, if not on several occasions, with the bones of the dead. Similar bony engagements are repeated not only on Bronze Age Cyprus but across the wider Near East and northern Europe throughout the Neolithic and Bronze Age. This chapter examines embodied practices in which human burials were deliberately manipulated and handled as an integral element of the funerary ritual, exploring the physical entanglement of matter – living flesh and dead bone – ostensibly actions performed to mediate communication between ancient communities and their ancestors. In so doing, it questions notions of personhood rooted in Enlightenment-inspired ontologies, in particular, the idea that the 'individual' disappears along with the flesh, skin and hair of their body to merge with the (bony) collective of the ancestors (cf. Hamilakis 2013, 145–8).

Who are the ancestors?

Bloch (1996, 43) describes the ancestors as our forebears who are remembered. The ancestors are the elect of the dead revered by later generations, the elders who are attributed with mythical powers and authority and who continue to play a significant role in the daily life of the community (Kopytoff 1971, 129; Keswani 2005, 360), intervening in the social relations of successive generations (Kopytoff 1971, 138–9). There is rich ethnographic evidence for the ancestors and textual evidence likewise suggests the significance of the ancestors within the patriarchal societies of the ancient Near East (Porter 2002, 4–5). This chapter questions whether we can materially situate the ancestors (or at least their bodily remains) within the landscapes of the Neolithic and Bronze Age in the East Mediterranean.

The post-mortem handling of human bones has frequently been used by archaeologists as evidence for an 'ancestor cult' (e.g. Barrett 1994, 51; Murphy 1998, 2011; Porter 2002; Keswani 2004, 2005), particularly in the context of Neolithic and Bronze Age societies where the practice is interpreted as a means by which kinship-based agricultural groups can bolster and legitimize their territorial claims (Morris 1991; Keswani 2005, 349). These approaches make specific reference to ethnographic analogy, such as the Merina of Madagascar (cf. Bloch 1985; Keswani 2004, 13) to make the case that a bounded burial ground provided a physical link to the ancestors, who had also been buried there. Barrett (1994, 51) has argued that the practice of rituals at the graveside served to reiterate social relations with the living, allowing the ancestors to intervene in their affairs. Indeed, while 'the deposition of the dead may serve to produce ancestral remains… ancestor rituals are fundamentally concerned with invoking the presence of the dead in order to structure, and provide sanction for, activities amongst the living' (Thomas 2000, 655).

Whitley (2002) has interrogated the extent to which archaeologists have 'unquestioningly' attributed significance to the ancestors in their interpretation of funerary remains (see also Barrett and Fewster 1998, 848); however, in response Pitts (2003) defends the ancestors as an important area of enquiry. Pitts highlights that ancestor cult is widespread across cultural boundaries, more so than Whitley suggests, and makes a case for the development of complex mortuary ritual as a means of demonstrating rights of lineage ancestors. As Barrett comments '[t]he physical remains of the corpse now becomes a medium through which different… strategies might have operated' (1994, 51). This chapter proposes another perspective on people's embodied interactions with the physical remains of the dead, to explore ideas of personhood and how this is materially created (see also Rahmen, this volume). It draws specifically upon Neolithic plastered skull cults in the Levant and the handling of skulls in Bronze Age Crete and Cyprus.

New Materialities, dead bodies and the ancestors

Despite the extensive archaeological literature on the ancestors and the manipulation of bones in secondary funerary ritual, the material and sensory implications of such practices have tended to be overlooked (see, however, Hamilakis 2013, 131–2). This chapter offers a New Materialities perspective to explore the relationships between dead, decomposing and disarticulated human bodies (at various stages from whole and fleshy, through putrefying and decaying, to the bare bones) and living human bodies. Specifically, it applies Barad's agential realism (2003, 2007) to this entanglement of matter within a framework informed by sensory

archaeology (cf. Hamilakis 2013). This approach aims to break down the boundaries between ostensibly inert matter and rational human actors – the latter who are deemed within western ontologies to be distinct from, and dominating, the natural material world. As Barad notes (2003, 821): '[m]atter is not an individual articulated or static entity… passively awaiting signification'. Instead, the New Materialities approach questions the notion that agency is the exclusive prerogative of thinking humans (Bennett 2010, 29–30; Coole and Frost 2010, 6–10, 15–16, 20), noting that humans 'are neither pure cause nor pure effect but [are] part of the world in its open-ended becoming' (Barad 2003, 821). In this chapter (see also Attala, Burton, Coard and Webster, this volume), I argue that the corporeal matter of the body itself has agential capacities, that it is vital matter (Bennett 2010) with the ability to effect change.

Handling the decaying body

Death should not be considered a single event – the transition of the living body into a dead corpse (Swazey 2013; see also Webster this volume). Instead, death is an ongoing material and social process, one that is negotiated and experienced in myriad ways in diverse cultural settings, as the living flesh transforms into other material compositions. One way in which we might explore social experiences of the materiality of death is through the culturally constituted treatment of the matter of the dead body. Certainly, Hertz (1960, 82–3) recognized that the physical transformation of the body from fleshy corpse to bare bones somehow effected a social transformation by which an individual – the deceased – moved from a mortal plane, perhaps entering the ranks of the ancestors:

> The gradual destruction of the earthly body… [and] the reduction of the corpse to bones, which are more or less unchangeable and upon which death will have no

> further hold, seems to be the condition and sign of the final deliverance. Now that the body is similar to those of its ancestors, there seems to be no longer any obstacle to… entering their community.

Furthermore, he argued that this process needed to be mediated through the physical movement of the bones, allowing these to tangibly become mixed with the bones of earlier ancestral burials:

> The material on which the collective activity will act after death, and which will be the object of the rites, is naturally the very body of the deceased. The integration of the deceased into [the society of ancestors]… will not be effected unless his material remains are reunited with those of his forefathers.
>
> (Hertz 1960, 83)

Although Hertz acknowledged that human bones were integral to interactions with the ancestors, he viewed the bones as passive and inert recipients of the actions of the living. He also ignored the haptic and other bodily sensations invoked by mixing with and handling the dead. Instead, in this chapter I will explore the inevitable entanglement of matter – living bodies and the bones of the dead – and how these practices variously developed in response to the capacities of dead and disarticulated bodies and were sensually experienced.

The material transformation (or flow of matter) of living, fleshy body into bone, through a process of putrefaction and decay, inevitably involves strong odours and possibly also the gooey sensation of handling flesh as it passes through morbid corruption. Thus, the physical manipulation, handling and modification to parts of a human body would certainly have resulted in intense bombardment of the senses – visual, tactile and olfactory – possibly

emphasized physically by performing such practices in cramped, dark funerary spaces, perhaps only lit by the flickering flames of a lamp. In traditional, rather sanitized archaeological accounts, this powerful sensory engagement has tended to be overlooked; more recently, however, this has been addressed by Hamilakis (2013, 131–2), who notes:

> … the physical presence of the person, long after stopping breathing and talking, continues to act upon others, in a haptic, olfactory, multi-sensory, and inevitably affective manner, its flesh transformed into something else.

A materialities-focused approach allows us to explore these material interactions between bodies and how they might have been experienced, with the aim of disentangling different understandings of personhood.

Plastered skulls of the Neolithic

Specialized treatment of the dead body characterizes the Pre-Pottery Neolithic[1] (PPNA and PPNB) in the Near East. In particular, the focus on the skull has given rise in the academic literature to the notion of a skull cult in the PPNB, surviving into the Pottery Neolithic in central Anatolia (see discussion in Bonogofsky 2003, 2004; Croucher 2012, 97–8). The origins of the so-called skull cult lie in funerary practices of the PPNA, which included the post-mortem removal of the cranium. Osteological evidence – including the absence of cut marks, as well as the presence of the hyoid bones and mandibles in the grave with post-cranial skeleton – indicates that this was done to the disarticulated bones once the flesh had decomposed and rotted away, suggesting that the living interacted physically with the burials of the deceased long after the body was placed in the ground. Specialized treatment of human skulls has recently been identified at the ritual site of Göbekli Tepe in eastern Anatolia,

comprising fragments of three human skulls, each marked by deep grooves carved along the sagittal axis; in one case the skull had been drilled (Gresky et al. 2017, fig. 3). Some scholars also suggest that the skulls were removed from the body and eventually placed in caches ‘as a means of recognizing a collective shared past and identity’ (Kuijt 1996, 322). Certainly, revisiting the grave, handling the bones and removing them highlights the entanglements binding the living and the dead (cf. Bennett 2010, for more detailed discussion of how matter, including people and objects, is entangled). For the living, we might argue that the ancestors were materialized through people’s haptic engagement with the matter of the bones.

Interactions with the skulls were transformed in the PPNB, with increased handling and modification of the cranial bone and a combination of substances being used to recreate the missing flesh and eyes of the living body. The facial features were modelled in lime plaster, marl and animal collagen (Fig. 5.1). The bone might be rubbed with an abrasive such as sand to help the plaster adhere and the facial features were enhanced by the use of paint, a coloured wash of reds and browns. There was particular emphasis on the eyes, with details added in charcoal and use of cowrie shells replacing the missing eyes (Bonogofsky 2003, 1–2; Croucher 2012, 94–7). Initial studies suggested that the teeth were deliberately removed to age the individual, making it more suited for veneration as the aged face of an ancestor in which age and experience is inscribed onto the bodily remains, but this has been contradicted by recent osteological analyses (Bonogofsky 2003, 5–6; 2004, 117; Croucher 2012, 112). We should also note that these practices involved only a small percentage of the overall burial population, suggesting careful selection of skulls of specific individuals, perhaps because of their specific social roles in life (Kuijt 2008).

[Figure 5.1 about here]

The plastered skulls were found in caches, grouped together beneath the floors of abandoned houses or associated with plastered surfaces. Wear on the surface of the plastered skulls suggests these were reburied after a period during which they were handled and displayed within the world of the living (Croucher 2012, 94). Typically, the skulls were found with a range of other materials: animal bones, horn cores, statuary fragments, ceramics, clay balls, stone, obsidian, bone tools, beads and possibly even copper (Bonogofsky 2004). The primary sensory impact of the skulls was undoubtedly visual, as is emphasized by the use of colour – white lime plaster, red and brown paints and black charcoal – as well as the staring cowrie-shell eyes. This assemblage of materials, especially the interactions with plaster, merits some discussion.

Lime plaster comprises a material substance with intriguing capacities (colour, malleability, porosity and antisepsis). It is produced in a volatile chemical transformation of earthy matter made possible through the materiality of fire and water (Goren et al. 1993, 120). This substance was increasingly embedded in the material world of the Neolithic (cf. Clarke 2012), within the built environment – where its white colour provided a blank canvas for the application of painted decoration – and for the production of plastered statues and heads (Goren et al. 1993; Grissom 2000). Much as Fayers-Kerr (this volume) observes, in relation to the socialization of earthy substances in East Africa, lime plaster was embedded within daily haptic experience and people were at ease with its handling and manipulation. The

choice of plaster for crafting images of people (also with shell eyes) as well as for modelling the facial flesh of the disembodied skulls is intriguing, suggesting it was considered akin to human flesh. The volatile nature of lime during its transformation probably animated this substance and made it appear alive to the Neolithic communities engaging with it. Indeed, Boivin (2004, 4–5) identifies this liveliness and vitality as a property commonly attributed to earthy substances, which in numerous ethnographies is described as alive, with creative powers and moreover is frequently linked to human flesh (Boivin 2004, 7). Perhaps the act of recreating the flesh of the disembodied skulls and replacing their eyes with shells was bringing the skull back to life, reanimating it with vital matter. We will return to this co-production of matter and the implications for personhood below.

As noted above, the skulls' primary sensory impact would probably have been visual: the staring eyes and the whiteness of the plaster, a colour we might take for granted in the modern world, but which occurs sparsely in nature, and was thus restricted in the Neolithic (cf. Govier 2017). These skulls demanded attention as they gazed back at the viewer, as indeed they still do today. This visual experience was undoubtedly intensified by the display of the skull inside a darkened house, lit by the flickering flames of the household fire, exaggerating the apparent animation of the plastered face.

We should also consider the tactile sensations involved in handling the plaster, shells and paint when these objects were created. This process of creation undoubtedly created a relationship and an intimacy between the crafter and the plastered skull, something that I

observed in a very different environment, in an experiential workshop with students, exploring the body (Fig. 5.2). In this workshop we attempted to recreate as much of the experience of plastering human skulls as was ethically possible. Our substitute skull was a realistic plastic ornament for an aquarium. The students modelled some of the facial features and musculature in clay before applying lime mortar over the entire surface of the skull. Cowrie shells were added as eyes to keep the replica faithful to the original. The lime mortar was mixed professionally and because of the substance's volatility the students wore plastic gloves, thereby depriving them of some possible tactile observations through the creation of a boundary between body and material. Modelling the skull began as an interesting intellectual exercise – there was lively discussion throughout about the problems involved in forming the face. However, as the face emerged so did a personality. From an inanimate object an individual emerged (intriguingly a gendered person), a relationship grew between the plastered skull and *his* makers/creators and this became an emotional process for the students involved. The discussion at the end of this task focused on this transformation – how a person might be (re-)created from an anonymous skull through the flow, entanglement and agency of matter – and this, in turn, shaped our understanding of some of the practices and ideas associated with the Neolithic originals.

[Figure 5.2 about here]

Bronze Age manipulations of skulls: Crete and Cyprus

The emphasis on the skull is evident in other examples of embodied interactions with the bones of the dead, including the tholos tombs of Early Minoan Crete.[2] In most of the Mesara tholos tombs very few skulls were found, in relation to the projected number of burials,

suggesting these had been removed deliberately (Branigan 1993, 124). In many other cases, the majority of bones recovered comprised disarticulated skulls and long bones (Murphy 1998, 35). Notably, Xanthoudides (1924, 7, 92) commented on skulls stacked together on one side of the tholos at both Koumasa tholos B and Platanos tholos B. Occasionally, skulls were brought back into the space of the living, as at Myrtou *Fournou Korifi* (Driessen 2010). A similar focus on the skull was also evident in the house tombs at Gournia; here they were deliberately removed from the post-cranial skeleton and frequently a small conical cup was placed by their side. This emphasis on the skull suggests that, as for the Neolithic communities of the Levant, the head of the deceased continued to be a vehicle for communion and maintaining or even forging relationships (see discussion below).

The skull was likewise the focus of post-mortem manipulation of the bones in Bronze Age Cyprus.[3] As highlighted in the introduction, no skulls were found in the tomb excavated at Arediou (Fig. 5.3; Steel and Thomas 2008, 243). I would suggest that these had been removed in the Late Bronze Age as part of what Keswani (2004, 13–21) describes as secondary funerary ritual. How and where the skulls were used and where they were eventually placed remains unsolved, but I would argue that these were involved in some form of ritual performance within the space of the living before being collected together, perhaps with skulls from other burials. Similar practices are attested at other sites in the north-west of the island, this time through the accumulation of large numbers of skulls in tomb groups. For example, an unusually large number of skulls in relation to the post-cranial bones were found in Tomb 6 at Morfou *Toumba tou Skourou* (Vermeule and Wolsky 1990, 309). More formalized treatment of the skulls is apparent at Politiko *Ayios Irakleidios*, where, in the upper level, seven skulls were placed together on the east side of the tomb and, in the lower

level, there was a heap of twelve skulls (Karageorghis 1965, 11–14). These practices seemingly had an ancient pedigree in Cyprus, stretching back to the Early-Middle Cypriot period; certainly, in many tombs at Vounous *Bellapais* there were only skulls, while in other tombs the skulls had been deliberately collected together away from the rest of the skeleton (Keswani 2004, 42–3). In all these cases the skulls had clearly been removed from their burials and collected together in some form of ritualized performance once the flesh had decomposed, but how they were physically handled and what was done with, or to, these skulls remains hidden from the archaeologist's gaze.

[Figure 5.3 about here]

As highlighted above, we should consider the sensory implications of the practices attested on both Cyprus and Crete. Certainly, the smell of dead and decaying bodies would have been experienced by the living as a matter of course during the rituals performed at the tombs. In the Early Minoan tholos tombs, the bodies of the dead were not buried, but instead were kept above ground; moreover, on both Cyprus and Crete there were regular tactile interactions between the living and the dead, during which skulls and long bones were moved around, presumably in various states of decomposition and possibly with rotting flesh, skin and hair still adhering. Hamilakis (2013, 138) suggests that localized patterns of burning evident in many of the tholos tombs was not performed to fumigate the structures of the smells of putrefying flesh but rather to aid the defleshing of specific bodies; whatever the intentions, the smoke, fire and smells of burning flesh further added to the sensory experiences of the living. Similar burning (fumigation or defleshing) practices are evident on Cyprus (Keswani 2004, 94). Certainly, the substantial evidence for post-mortem manipulation of the

disarticulated bones, including the removal of residual flesh and hair using obsidian blades (Murphy 1998, 34), would have bombarded not only the olfactory senses, but also the haptic experiences of the individuals engaged in these practices.

Hamilakis (2013, 134–6) situates these practices at the tombs within wider sensory experiences, including the application of sticky, scented perfumes and unguents to the body of the (recently?) deceased, the tastes and smells of food and drink, including alcohol with its mind-altering properties, and possibly even the consumption of psychoactive substances such as opium. A similar range of embodied practices can likewise be posited for Late Bronze Age Cyprus. Small perfume vases and unguent containers were typically placed in Late Bronze Age tombs (Steel 1998, 295–6) and were plausibly used for anointing the body (flesh at first and later the bones) and clothing or shrouds of the deceased, perhaps in part to disguise the smells of putrefaction. Consumption of alcohol and feasting have both been demonstrated to be a regular element of funerary practices throughout the Bronze Age (cf. Herscher 1997; Steel 2004a) and Collard (2017) makes a convincing case for the ingestion of opium in Late Bronze Age Cyprus. The mind-altering properties of these substances undoubtedly affected the experiences of the living participant as they were ingested and incorporated within their bodies (see Attala this volume for an in-depth discussion of how ingested substances and human bodies interact and co-produce).

There is material evidence, on the surface at least, for very similar sensorial experiences at the graveside, albeit within very different cultural settings. The Early Minoan tholos tombs

were imposing stone-built circular structures (single or in pairs), sometimes with additional square stone annexes. These were separate from the space of the living and associated with small non-urban communities (cf. Branigan 1993; Murphy 1998). The Early-Middle Bronze Age Cypriot communities also chose to bury their dead outside the settlement; however, these communities were much larger and the extra-mural cemeteries accordingly were bigger and comprised numerous sizeable chambers cut into the bedrock, typically re-used many times (Keswani 2004, 39–41, 55–62). Late Bronze Age burials on Cyprus, however, were more typically located inside the settlement, placed within chamber tombs positioned beneath the streets or the courts of houses (Keswani 2004, 87–8). The very different location of burial and proximity or otherwise to the space of the living, therefore, would indicate very different physical engagements between the living and the dead. Moreover, despite the apparent similarities, the underlying social processes should not be essentialized into a single experience of death (cf. Swazey 2013). As highlighted by Csordas (1994, 5), the embodied experiences of the living, fleshy bodies and bony remains of the dead were situated within culturally specific networks of relations and should be understood within their own social contexts. Nonetheless, current understanding in both cases is that the manipulation of the bones was as a means of mediating with the ancestors (e.g. Murphy 1998; Keswani 2004, 151–2; 2005, 342, 350, 360–1). Here I want to develop an alternative approach that emphasizes material engagements as a means of constructing and negotiating personhood.

Agential realities and the ancestors: challenging notions of bounded personhood

What, then, is happening in these many different intermingling relationships between living and dead bodies? Within the New Materialities perspective we might view the combinations

of matter within these diverse manipulations of human physical remains in the Neolithic and Bronze Age as phenomena, following Barad (2003, 2007). Rather than considering the skulls, the bodies of the living and other materials as discrete or separate entities, this instead encourages us to think about *relationships* between matter as it entangles, works together and co-produces, or 'intra-acts' (Barad 2003, 814–15; 2007, 139–41). Living flesh and skin (namely the hands of the people performing the ritual), the bony remains of the dead (in particular, the skulls and long bones), the fire and obsidian blades used to 'clean' the bones, lime mortar applied to Neolithic skulls, and cowrie shells embedded in the eye sockets, as well as the various substances anointing the flesh of the recently dead or ingested and absorbed by the flesh of the living (cf. Attala this volume) are none of them 'independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties' (Barad 2003, 815), but instead are agents within an entanglement, 'intra-acting', mingling together and co-producing the ancestors. These objects, the distinct matter we identify in the archaeological record as well as the seemingly invisible living human actors, emerge through these intra-actions, namely the performance of the ancestral funerary rites, and the co-production of matter produces meaning through its materiality: the material world is 'composed not of things-in-themselves… but of things-in-phenomena' (Barad 2007, 140).

Thinking about how matters come together requires a reconsideration of the individual and draws us closer to seeing matters as collective events. This suggests a blurring of boundaries between things, including human bodies (Barad 2003, 815; see also Attala, Fayers-Kerr and Govier, this volume), and thus allows us to question ontologies of separation and dualities, which are embedded in archaeological interpretations of the *living individual* joining the *collective of the ancestors* in death. No doubt, this derives in part from Hertz's (1960, 82–3) description of the deceased becoming one with the collective of ancestors by the

disintegration of their flesh, but it is comfortably unchallenged by ‘notion[s] of being an individual… [which] is at the heart of who we consider ourselves to be’ (Harris and Cipolla 2017, 61). Ethnographies, however, provide numerous examples of ways of being and human experiences far removed from perspectives of the bounded individual (cf. Fowler 2004). The Melanesian notion of personhood emerging from composite relationships between different people is a particularly pertinent example for the porosity of human bodies and the intermingling and co-production or intra-action of matter. Strathern (1988, 13, 207–19) highlights, for example, exchanges of bodily substances such as semen or breast milk. Another example of *dividual* personhood is the so-called ‘net of maya’ of northern India; this is ‘formed through the everyday activities of sharing food, touching, sleeping in the same bed, having sexual relations, exchanging words…’ (Lamb 2000, 28) as much as through material possessions and a sense of belonging in the village landscape (Lamb 2000, 30; see also Rahmen, this volume, for how the body and healthy personhood are rooted in the riverine landscape of the Amazon through interactions with the river water). In these two geographically disparate examples, then, personhood is not housed individually within a bounded human body; instead people are interlinked within complex networks of social ties, they are porous and become socialized through flows of substances – material and immaterial – they are ‘“composite” and hence “dividual” or divisible in nature’ (Lamb 2000, 31). Fowler (2004, 19) notes a distinction between the partible dividual of Melanesia and the more permeable notion of personhood in India, as illustrated, for example, by the exchange or flow of bodily substances between people, reminding us that the dividual is not a single category of personhood that we can apply unthinkingly to the archaeological record. Nonetheless, there is some consensus (cf. Lamb 2000, 37–41) that the concept of bounded, separate persons, or individuals, is in fact ‘a rather peculiar idea within the context of world cultures’

(Geertz 1984, 59, cited in Lamb 2000, 37), which allows us to consider the many ways in which personhood was experienced and performed within myriad material entanglements.

People and bodies, therefore, should not be viewed as inevitably 'independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties but rather [as] phenomena' (Barad 2003, 815). Thus, we do not need to posit a transformation from the bounded individual to the collective ancestors, once the flesh rots away and the bones of the body become disarticulated. Instead, we might think of the embodied practices in which living and dead bodies, and other matter, work together as a means of negotiating social bonds and creating ever more elaborate networks of relations. This is characterized by Hamilakis (2013, 154), with specific relation to the tholos tombs of the Mesara, as 'a fluid corporeal landscape', in which living and dead bodies, disarticulated body parts and material objects comingled and co-produced each other.

Conclusions

Thinking about human bodies through the lens of the New Materialities enables us to develop new understandings of ancient funerary practices and differing notions of personhood, moving us beyond the limits of a western mindset embedded in notions of duality, separation and boundaries. In particular, the application of Barad's agential realist approach to the archaeological record is potentially of immense archaeological value, allowing us to think about the fluidity, entanglement and agency of matter. The widespread post-mortem handling of skeletal remains throughout the Near East and Aegean need not simply be relegated to an essentialist narrative of the ancestors who were enacted through the agency of the living.

Bones – in the examples discussed here the skulls of *some* of the dead – were not simply inert matter waiting to be acted upon. Certainly, the skulls were transformed, not only through the natural processes of decay but also as a result of human intra-actions and relationships with other matter; nonetheless, within the meshwork of relationships between materials, the skulls had their own agential capacities and played an important role in shaping the social, material and sensual worlds of the living. Significantly, the New Materialities perspective allows us to question notions of discrete, separate, bounded individuals and bodies, instead exploring personhood as something fluid and intermingling, created through multiple material engagements and sensually experienced. It reveals how the physical body continues, even in death, to be vital matter with the ability to effect change. If we examine the entanglement of matter as phenomena we can engage in new ways with the materials we excavate. Indeed, exploring relationships between these (archaeological) materials as intra-actions demonstrates how 'things-in-phenomena' are more meaningful than the sum of their parts (cf. Govier 2017).

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Notes

[1] The Pre-Pottery Neolithic is subdivided into two main phases: the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA), associated with the initial domestication of plants, and the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB), associated with the domestication of animals. See discussion in Watkins (2013).

[2] For an overview of the Early Minoan (or Early Bronze Age) on Crete, essentially the third millennium BC, see Tomkins and Schoep (2012). The Mesara tholos tombs have been extensively studied, most notably by Branigan (1993) and Murphy (1998, 2011).

[3] Keswani (2004) provides excellent contextualization and detailed discussion of Bronze Age burials from Cyprus. See also Steel (2004b, chapters 5 and 6) for an overview of the Cypriot Bronze Age.